

Volunteer Organizations in Contradistinction to Commercial Organizations

Working with Volunteers

The failure of many volunteer organizations are often due to poor utilization of volunteers. In fact, lack of volunteers is the number one limiting factor facing volunteer organizations in today's rather harried times.

In a volunteer organization it is made clear that everyone can choose to participate in any event or not. The one gray area is when someone makes a commitment to perform an essential task and does not fulfill their promise. Although the volunteer organization cannot and should not attempt to force the volunteer to perform the task, that individual becomes untrustworthy and is relieved of their position and replaced.

Making a commitment is not easy due to today's socioeconomic stressors such as increased Cost of Living (COL), family obligations, accelerated college tuition costs, health care, affordable housing shortages, and other socio-economic situations. In today's milieu, volunteers are to be welcomed, cherished, encouraged, and highly regarded. Professionals and unionists must refrain from being standoffish, haughty, and harsh on non-professionals. Day to day professionals do not work for free and know that their income depends on following standards and directives. They are accustomed to perform as they are told, but volunteers are asked to perform as they are asked.

Most volunteer organizations are staffed by people who work or have worked in the commercial or military sectors where employees were treated very differently. In business the manager "tells" the employee to go to such and such an address and do such and such a task. The employee, being paid money, obeys as per their contractual agreement.

There are two broad categories of volunteers:

- A. Volunteers within a volunteer organization
- B. Volunteers within a professional organization

A.

In a volunteer organization the leader or manager would approach a needed task by "asking" for volunteers in general, unless there is one or more identifiable specialists that the leader believes would do the best job according to best practices. In either case, the task master would ask (not tell) the volunteer if they would be willing to help to do this or that task and then give the volunteer any job description, necessary training, preparation, tools, or directions. Before the volunteer commits those details or its general outline and purpose should be clearly communicated to the potential volunteer..

That volunteer also accepts not just responsibility, but also gains some authority over the project's implementation within the organization. Hence, every task contains an element of

domain ownership. Such responsible volunteers need to be recognized and respected by the volunteer organization. The more active participants encourages overall organizational pride and a personal sense of domain ownership. Domain ownership occurs when a sense of personal well-being and pride coincides with the excellence of the task well done.

Delegation

Delegation of jobs goes along with delegation of authority/control: Control Freaks beware! That is, the delegator relinquishes control over the delegated job's domain. Sadly, too often managers believe that no one else is qualified as much as they are, and thus no one else can do as good a job. That attitude prevents the ready delegation of authority, prevents timely performance results, discourages teamwork, and can lead to burn out when a leader takes on more than individual time permits.

Delegation often requires training of the volunteer, thus overall skill in the organization is accelerated. Remember delegation is not the same as ordering, manipulating, or controlling another member of the organization. It should be seen as an opportunity to better the overall effectiveness and common purpose of the entire group.

B: The interactive roles of the volunteer within a professional agency

Agencies who are staffed by sworn officers such as firefighters, police, or those run by FEMA with a militaristic orientation need to be trained how to work with volunteers. Treating volunteers with suspicion simply is counterproductive, but such attitudes are unfortunately increasing.

Welcoming the volunteer is crucial. Asking them to do this or that should be framed as a question, rather than as an imperative. Professionals must realize that most volunteers are sacrificing time with their family or jobs in order to help. Perhaps the most counterproductive attitude would be to act as a drill sergeant, barking out orders or otherwise acting disrespectful toward non-professionals.

Volunteers also must learn to act respectfully when working with professionals. The cardinal sin, although often over publicized, is to never indicate to a professional that one knows better or take a patronizing or pedantic attitude, especially when you know that you do know better. Examples are volunteers who are graduates of the CommL and CommT training when interacting with professionals who have never served in disasters and have little or no communications expertise. Making friends and acting as a mutually supportive team is always the best approach. If you have more experience and have a good idea, try sharing it by making hints. Use phrases like, "I'm wondering what would happen if we did this or that," or "that's a good idea. I was thinking of doing it this or that way"... etc.

Volunteers may find a friendly, welcoming, and grateful work environment, or in the worst case, a hostile, suspicious or jealous environment. Keep in mind that you are a diplomatic

ambassador from Amateur Radio, and your actions will reflect upon our groups relationship with the agency involved.

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